

Angola at Peace

Coordinator: Didier Péclard

On April 4 2002, a cease fire signed between the Angolan government, controlled by the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) put an end to one of Africa's longest-running civil wars ever (1975-2002).

Ushered in by the death on February 22 2002 of UNITA's founder and long-time leader Jonas Savimbi, peace in Angola came violently: bullets, not negotiation between the warring parties, made it possible. With it came the endpoint of a face-off that had begun shortly after independence and that had seen possibilities of resolution go up in smoke with the abject failure of two peace initiatives (Bicesse 1991-1192 and Lusaka 1994). It also rendered "official," as it were, the governing role of the MPLA, in power since the country gained its independence in 1975, and the role as national leader of president José Eduardo dos Santos, who took over from Agostinho Neto, Angola's first president, at the latter's death in 1979.

The ongoing battle between UNITA and the MPLA came on the heels of fourteen years of violent conflict in the quest for independence (1961-1974). Clearly, Angola's recent history cannot be dissociated from its long experience of war. In the second trimester of 2008, legislative elections pushed back on numerous occasions should finally take place, marking the "democratic normalization" of the country. Peace, thus, has come, but laden with a heavy inheritance of violence and conflict. It is on this inheritance that *Politique Africaine's* issue dedicated to Angola will focus. Our goal is not to propose a new analysis of the war as such (in this regard, cf. the journal's 1995 issue entitled "Angola at War"). We seek, rather, to interrogate ways in which Angolan society has been (re) fashioned by the many years of warfare it has suffered, to consider extents to which war, in this context, has constituted a factor of change, to query how such change is experienced today, and to analyze different trajectories of re-conversion (personal, institutional, political, economic, etc.) made possible by the end of the war.

(1) The war was first and foremost an experience that marked individuals, on a personal level. From the choice of youth to enter the battle for independence in the 1960s or their forced enrollment in the colonial army to recruitment at gunpoint and mobilization campaigns in the 1990s, the war shaped personal itineraries and acted as both a means and a process of subjectivation for numerous Angolans. Very little research has been done on this and related concerns. It seems timely, thus, as a first step in beginning to understand the impact of the war on the country, to look back on: the conditions under which soldiers were enrolled during the first and second phases of fighting; the moral economy (and the economy of warfare) of both UNITA and the MPLA; and on the construction – if indeed one can speak thus – of what Christian Geffray has called a "social corpus of war" (*un corps social guerrier*) in his work on Mozambique's RENAMO. The latter, one might consider approaching via an analysis of life in Jamba, the so-called "capital" of UNITA, in the far south-eastern reaches of the country, during the 1980s.

A second step would involve thinking about ways in which, individually and on a community level, people deal with demobilization and the return to civilian life – this notably as regards the tens of thousands of UNITA soldiers who have not been incorporated into the Angolan Armed Forces. Beyond the official programs developed to ensure the reinsertion of ex-combatants into the social fabric – programs that are getting off to a slow start and are leaving many men and their families in extremely precarious conditions – what types of local strategies are there that seek to reintegrate men who were once soldiers into their communities of origin? How is memory of the war lived – dealt with, articulated, shaped and reshaped – in particular in regions that, at different points, were controlled by both UNITA and the MPLA?

If the war proved to be a forced itinerary of subjectivation for an entire generation of Angolans, it also opened the door to novel itineraries of accumulation, new ways for certain members of the Angolan elite to gain financial, political and social capital. The emergence and growth of the Angolan oil nomenclatura, whose internal mechanics were studied with such finesse by Christine Messiant, cannot be dissociated from the history of the war. How is this nomenclatura adapting to peace? In a broader sense, has peace brought any changes to the political economy of oil, to this key « off-shore » sector of the Angolan economy? And what of diamonds, whose control, production and sales played a fundamental role in UNITA's war strategy during the 1990s? What itineraries of accumulation did the diamond sector make possible during the war and how have these been affected by the coming of peace? In the analysis of these itineraries of accumulation it will be essential, as well, to address the role played by superior officers and generals in the Angolan army, not only during the war, but also after it, with a particular focus on their re-conversion into various sectors of the Angolan economy. Some have set afoot private security companies – indeed, the number of these companies has ballooned since the mid-1990s; others have acquired vast tracts of land and what were once important agricultural *fazendas* in the interior of the country; still others have invested heavily in real estate and even, it appears, in the art market. All of these examples, and others still, shed considerable light on Angola's transition from a country at war to one at peace. Are we witnessing, here, a “simple” manifestation of the clientelist redistribution system developed by the MPLA? An expression of the sheer heft represented by the military in Angola's political economy? A behind-closed-doors battle for the distribution of peace dividends?

(2) Needless to say, the war played a fundamental role in shaping the political life of Angola. During the twenty-five years of armed conflict, the political “game” centered incessantly, and ever more closely, on the two principal belligerents, gradually excluding any other “players.” The Bicesse Accord, the first instance in which a peace agreement was signed, and which led to the only democratic elections the country has experienced to this day (September 1992), reinforced this state of affairs, shifting the conflict from the military to the political theatre rather than actually resolving it, and, in so doing, setting the stage for a return of the war as early as November 1992. The Lusaka Protocol of 1994, the “neither war nor peace” scenario to which it gave rise, and especially the return to a state of active war as early as December 1998 – the final stretch that ushered in the complete defeat of UNITA and the cease fire of 2002 – were all variations on the same theme. The emergence of a “third way” and the more than minor role accorded to “civil society” forces on the Angolan political scene today are direct results of the war, of the terrible burden it has left behind, with which the country must somehow manage to cope. Indeed, it is not only the war and the failure of the two attempts at

bringing peace in the 1990s that forced off the stage any political force other than the two main camps. The manner in which peace itself was brought into being reinforced this logic. This is underscored by the fact that the resumption of hostilities in 1998-1999 and the vast FAA offensive that led to the military defeat of UNITA were, at least in part, a response to the heft that several actors had acquired in the political and media arenas (both nationally and internationally). Most notable among these actors were organizations – first and foremost several of the country’s Churches – intent on finding a negotiated solution and elaborating a national reconciliation process involving all parties to the conflict. In this sense, the government troops’ military victory over the UNITA “rebels” was first and foremost a political victory for the MPLA and president Dos Santos, who now have greater control than ever over the levers of power and for whom what is perhaps most fundamental in these times of peace is to go through the motions of democratization without losing an inch of the authoritarian power they have accrued.

A key issue, thus, will be to establish how the principal actors on the Angolan political scene are repositioning themselves in the post-war period and how they are handling their “warring past” as they prepare for the elections to come. Even though it has come out on the winning side, peace, for the MPLA is not without its potential pitfalls. Historically – indeed, since its very creation – the party has been a profoundly divided entity. How, now, will it deal with the “disappearance” of its principal enemy, whose very existence, during the war, acted as a factor of cohesion, papering over dissensions among various factions and members of the party? Will redistribution of oil rents suffice to compensate for the absence of this “counterveiling” presence? What role do (and will) the elections play in the MPLA’s hegemonic strategy? To what extent is the government playing the democratic card while, at the very same time, maintaining a security obsessed, vise-like grip on Angolan society? How is UNITA, on its end, handling the transformation from a post-Savimbi, war-driven movement whose sole *raison-d’être* was the quest for power into a political party – a party that remains the MPLA’s main opposition, but is nonetheless now a mere shadow of its former self? How will UNITA construct its memory/ies of the war, face the experience of defeat and the baggage that comes with traditions born of the totalitarian exercise of power? And what of a “third way” – an approach on everyone’s mind but that seems never quite to materialize – in a pre-electoral context characterized by extreme policing by the state of all opposition parties, the MPLA’s goal being, it would seem, to leave nothing to chance when the time comes to vote. In this latter regard, it would be interesting to distinguish the situation in Luanda from that extant in other parts of the country and to concentrate on political dynamics at a local level. What is the nature of these dynamics in a military/rentier state that has won “its war”? What forms does the clientelist apparatus of the MPLA take on a local level? How is the (re)deployment of the state negotiated beyond the capital, notably in areas once controlled by UNITA? Here, particular attention should be paid to the situation in Cabinda, which stands, *de facto*, on the brink of war – a state of affairs that highlights the many tensions and contradictions inherent to the peace process, poised as it is between democratic *ouverture* and securitarian (re)pression.

(3) In many respects, the history of Angola is one of extraversion, from the particularly violent nature of the Atlantic trade in these parts, to complex and privileged links which the elite entertained with Brazil in the 19th century, the importance of foreign (i.e. non-Portuguese) investments in the colonial economy, and the key role played by Protestant

missionary societies, as well as other-than-Portuguese Catholic orders. More recently, the civil war too has acted as a motor for extraversion. This has been so in many settings: via allegiances forged during the Cold War between the two main camps and their respective “patrons”; as a result of the importance accorded to oil and diamonds in the political economy of warfare during the 1990s; through the presence of international actors in the various failed attempts to bring an end to the conflict; and the progressive sidelining of UNITA in the broader context of the campaign against “blood diamonds.” All of these processes have played a significant role in the “internationalization” of the Angolan war. As concerns this subject, it will be of particular interest to analyze the role played by the international community since the return to peace. This will require examining closely the manner in which links to foreign entities and undertakings have acted as key vectors in the oil nomenclatura’s increasing rise to power; it will also call for close attention to the reconfiguration of such alliances as are outlined above in times of peace (and in the context of an economic boom due to the rising cost of unrefined oil on world markets of late). In this renewed landscape, China, it is well established, has imposed itself as an actor that none can afford to ignore or bypass, whether as an investor in massive reconstruction and infrastructural projects launched by the government, as a lender that has allowed the Angolan state not to capitulate before demands made by the IMF and World Bank, as a furnisher of all manner of merchandise, or as a new player in the distribution of oil exploitation licenses. It will also be essential to consider, in broader terms, how the country is repositioning itself on the African and international scenes and to analyze, notably, if and how Angola as a military/oil producing power has been able to capitalize on the role it played in other conflicts – sub-regional conflicts such as those of Congo-Brazzaville and the DRC – so as to increase its influence, in particular vis-à-vis two of its principal competitors: South Africa and Nigeria.

Article proposal abstracts are due by 25 November 2007 at the latest and should be e.mailed to didier.peclard@swisspeace.ch. A first draft of articles chosen for publication should be submitted by 10 January 2008.